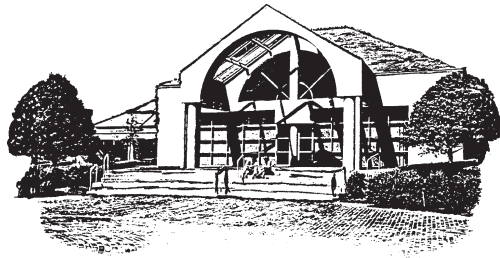


The Council Report

APRIL 2001

News from the Friendship Heights Village Council—
the elected governing body of the Special Tax District
of the Village of Friendship Heights



The Mayor Responds

Most of you have recently received a pink sheet from a presumably non-partisan organization which is actually a thinly disguised and inaccurate political statement written by a candidate for village council in the upcoming May election. Since I will not be running for any office next month I would like to answer and try to correct a few of these many misleading comments.

1) Your Council is accused of revising regulations without public notice. Not so. In fact, we were trying to find an administrative way that our local security guard could issue citations for **existing** regulations, such as noise and dog waste removal. Previously, these old regulations, passed by the County Council years (or decades) ago, had to be enforced by county police, both impractical and inappropriate considering their many other more important duties. We were working with county officials (the Executive and Council) as well as county attorneys and police, to find a mutually satisfactory way to prevent our community being subjected to noise and waste scofflaws.

The sum total effect of the legal challenges and political maneuvering of this “pink sheet organization” was to delay implementation of these reasonable changes until the old regulations could be written in newer legalese, changing no meanings but using different words.

2) Your Council is accused of refusing to establish binding budget policies. The facts: we hold two budget hearings every year, fully publicized and open to the public. The budget is mailed to every household in the village, asking for comments **BEFORE** the council votes. Many years ago we voted (in public session) to set a goal of one year’s revenue as a contingency fund. We are proud to have attained that goal, which is approximately \$1.4 million. We also established a capital improvements fund for such future items as road resurfacing, fountain repair, undergrounding of utilities, and replacement of park lights, to name just a few. A minimum estimated goal is \$750,000 (which is publicly available in detail) and has presently just over \$400,000 set aside. We do not think any budget should be kept in a straitjacket, unable to change. When our winter snow removal cost is suddenly doubled (as it was years ago) we must be able to pay the bill without waiting to change the budget. **All new major expense items are placed on the monthly agenda, posted on bulletin boards and sent to the residential buildings, BEFORE** a full public discussion and public vote. If we did not have this flexibility for change we could not have purchased the little house at 4602 North Park Avenue years ago, and a highrise might now stand there blocking views for the

Carleton, the Elizabeth, and 4620.

3) The “pink sheet” falsely states that “most government bodies do not exceed 25% (of their operating budget as a contingency fund) while local condos use a 10% figure for operating contingencies.” Of course, *some* do have low reserves, and many of these come up short for unexpected emergencies. That is why some of our condominiums have in the past been forced to have special **ASSESSMENTS**, which we all abhor. In fact, despite the “pink sheet” misstatement, **NONE** of the surrounding towns have only 25% contingency funds: **Town of Chevy Chase=64%, Chevy Chase Village= 77%, Somerset= 105%, and Martin’s Additions= 172%.**

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The Village Council took the following actions at the April 9, 2001 Council meeting:

- Selected “Willoughby Park” as the name for the new park next to the Willoughby;
- Approved option offered by developer to provide shuttle bus service to Westbard grocery store during construction at Chevy Chase Center;
- Approved proposal from MVM Security for security contract;
- Nominated Pat McDonough for at-large candidate on Maryland Municipal League’s Montgomery County Chapter Board of Directors.

MVA Mobile Office—Monday, April 23, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

4) Your Council is criticized for discussing public health issues. Our state charter specifically refers to “police and health powers”, and a state law specifically allows local jurisdictions such as ours to prohibit guns within 100 yards of public meeting places. Since our community has the largest concentration of elderly outside of Leisure World, your Council felt it was only appropriate to endorse a

comprehensive health care system which would guarantee quality health care for all Marylanders and include “access to affordable, quality health care”... and “freedom to choose their doctors and other health professionals.”

Hundreds of other organizations and individuals have joined us in this endorsement. How did these discussions of important public health issues hurt anyone in

this village?

And as for the smoking debate, yes, there were honest disagreements. But once again your Council discussed an important public health issue in the open, and after the smoke had cleared Judge Thompson concluded that the Village’s regulation was **“reasonably designed to promote public health”** and that the **“effort**

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of Friendship Heights to protect its citizens and others from a significant health risk is ADMIRABLE (emphasis added).” Yes, in a free and open society we should be able to disagree, but can’t we do it without being disagreeable? Do we really want opponents yelling obscenities at their elected officials? Rather than continue expending funds after Judge Thompson ruled “on the narrowest of grounds” to invalidate the regulation, we declined to appeal and repealed the regulation.

As I finish 26 years of service on your Village Council I would like to thank my colleagues on the Council, the staff, and the dozens of volunteers who have made all the village accomplishments

possible. Together we have created a community that is a showplace of progressivism. Unparalleled services and amenities, from our shuttle bus to our award-winning parks to our creative programs and trips, have combined to make our Village one of the most sought after residential and business locations in the metropolitan area. Our reputation of low taxes (down 29% in 3 years) and high services simply cannot be beaten.

We should be concentrating on how to protect these many benefits we have and expand them to include others. Instead, the “pink sheet” philosophy prefers negative comments and personal attacks. They would rather criticize than

create. And they are using me as an excuse and diversion to take over the Council. This must not be allowed to happen.

I should not be the issue. Twenty-six years of programs and services should be the issue. And who is best capable of maintaining and strengthening these community amenities. In short, who is best qualified to **PROTECT** our community—**not** change it.

We can best focus on this issue if I am not the distraction. I therefore will not run for reelection in May. Thank you for the great privilege and honor you have given me to serve all these years.

God bless you all.

—**Alfred Muller, M.D.**
Mayor

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